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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 WELLINGTON 000107

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/ANP

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [NZ](#)

SUBJECT: NEW ZEALAND: PIF TO SUSPEND FIJI ON MAY 2

Classified By: Acting DCM Margaret B. McKean; Reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) On May 1, Australian media reported that Fijian military leader Bainimarama offered to hold a summit with Australia and New Zealand to persuade both countries that Bainimarama's proposed timetable for a return to democracy in Fiji is necessary. Bainimarama further predicted that other PIF members would not support Fiji's suspension from the Pacific Island Forum (PIF). (Note: If the PIF does agree to suspend Fiji, it will be the first time that a PIF member state is suspended. End Note.) In remarks to the press on April 30, New Zealand Foreign Minister Murray McCully assured reporters that Fiji's suspension will be automatic as of May 2 because Fiji has not met the May 1 deadline for setting an election date by year's end -- as demanded by the Pacific Island Forum leaders earlier this year. McCully further added that the PIF Secretariat would remain in Suva for the time being, noting that any retaliatory action by the Fijian authorities that affects PIF operations likely would prompt further review among member states. McCully's statements follow on Fijian Attorney General Sayed-Khaiyum's April 29 statements concluding that the Forum would not suspend Fiji. McCully's response to the Attorney General's remarks was "I admire his optimism."

¶2. (U) Bainimarama's media remarks affirmed that he has no plans for an early election, and reiterated the call for a 2014 election date. The Fijian military leader said that an election in 2009 would only return former Fijian Prime Minister Qarase to power, and that the latter cannot be allowed to resume the leadership of Fiji. Bainimarama asked Australia and New Zealand to drop their demands for 2009 elections, and called on the other PIF states to not listen to Australia and New Zealand. He also credited U.S. Representative Eni Faleomavaega with having a better understanding of the situation in Samoa and that Faleomavaega's views, rather than those of Australia and New Zealand, should form the basis of USG policy towards Fiji.

¶3. (C) A/DCM contacted the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) Pacific Division on May 1, and spoke with Fiji desk officer Brian Hewson about next steps. The MFAT official said that the Ministry had received a draft letter from the Forum Chair (Niuean Prime Minister Tolagi) confirming Fiji's suspension on May 2 after the deadline of May 1 had passed. The letter would note the Forum's deep regret that the regime in Suva did not take the actions recommended by Forum leaders, and as a consequence, the PIF leaders have no choice but to confirm Fiji's suspension from PIF activities.

¶4. (C) Hewson noted that New Zealand will not issue a statement in response to Bainimarama's summit proposal or anything further on the Forum's action until after the Forum

Chair makes the news public -- which will likely be May 2. MFAT has concluded that Bainimarama's recent statements and summit proposal were a last-ditch effort to delay suspension and try to drive a wedge between Australia and New Zealand on the one hand, and the rest of the PIF members. He also stated that the summit proposal was an attempt to convince a naive audience that Fiji is willing to engage and only Australia and New Zealand are the problem. Hewson said that Bainimarama had floated a similar proposal before, and referred to the period just prior to the expulsion of the New Zealand acting High Commissioner in late 2008 when the Fiji authorities' offered to send a three-person delegation to New Zealand to sort out differences. Hewson confirmed that a summit meeting with Fiji on Bainimarama's terms was a non-starter.

15. (C) New Zealand and Australia are consulting closely on Fiji, said Hewson, particularly with respect to what the post-May 1 environment will be like after the suspension is announced. Neither country has a clear idea as to how the Fijian authorities will react and whether some of the small island states who are dependent on Fiji for transport and other linkages will be negatively affected.

16. (C) The British High Commissioner recently had lunch with FM McCully, who reportedly said that it may be time to push Fiji down the list of priority issues until conditions allow for improved engagement. He allegedly indicated that perhaps things need to get much worse in Fiji before Fijians themselves decide to create the circumstances under which the international community can help things improve.

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